United Nations S/PV.8242

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8242nd meeting

Wednesday, 25 April 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Meza-Cuadra	(Peru)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Dah
	Equatorial Guinea	Mrs. Mele Colifa
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Ms. Eckels-Currie

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/369)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-12332 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018) (S/2018/369)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/369, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018).

I now give the floor to Ms. Mueller.

Ms. Mueller: As we speak, the second Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region is reaching its conclusion. The meeting, hosted by the European Union and co-chaired by the United Nations, has been an important opportunity to renew and strengthen the commitment of the international community to the Syrian people. The Conference reconfirmed the importance of delivering needs-based humanitarian assistance to all civilians, in line with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Significant funds are being raised in support of that goal.

The commitments being made in Brussels come at a critical time, as the needs inside Syria could not be higher. Of the 13.1 million people in need, some 5.6 million are in acute need. Despite resolution 2401 (2018), attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure have reached some of the highest levels since the conflict began. In the first three months of 2018, the United Nations verified 72 attacks on health-care facilities, as compared to 112 attacks in all of 2017. At the same time, cross-line access remains extremely constricted, with only five convoys deploying so far in 2018. A strong response from Member States has never been more in need.

Over 160,000 people left eastern Ghouta between 9 March and 15 April, following weeks of fighting. Of those, 92,000 went to sites for internally displaced in rural Damascus. Nearly 45,000 of those people remain at the sites, which are at nearly double their capacity. The United Nations and its partners are responding to the mounting humanitarian needs of those displaced by providing food, shelter, health care and other assistance and protection services. However, assistance alone is not enough; additional sites urgently need to be made functional so as to ensure adequate living space for all internally displaced persons.

Approximately 71,000 people have been transported to north-western Syria since mid-March from eastern Ghouta and eastern Qalamoun. In Idlib, lack of accommodation, continued fighting and insecurity are ongoing challenges. The latest movements saw people accommodated in the Euphrates Shield area of northern Aleppo. Humanitarian access to these areas remains limited, however, and subject to the restrictions imposed by the local authorities in place.

While eastern Ghouta is no longer besieged as it has come under the control of the Government of Syria, the United Nations has not yet been granted access to Douma, where an estimated 70,000 individuals remain in dire need of humanitarian assistance after years of besiegement and months under intensified shelling and air strikes. The United Nations was last permitted to reach Douma over a month ago, on 15 March, with food assistance for only 26,100 individuals. The United Nations also requires urgent access to the formerly besieged areas of Nashabiyah, Kafr Batna, Saqba and Hamuriyah, where we expect needs to be great. In and around eastern Ghouta alone, there is currently a funding gap of $95 million to assist the population in need.

Late last week, hostilities between Government forces and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in the besieged area of Yarmouk and neighbouring areas, resulted in reports of civilian casualties and destruction of civilian infrastructure. The access points for over 66,000 people in need are virtually closed. The United Nations stands ready to deliver humanitarian

assistance to people in need in southern Damascus areas, but the required approvals and guarantees of safe passage are necessary.

At the same time, there has been an alarming escalation of violence between Government forces and non-State armed opposition groups in northern rural Homs and southern Hama governorate, impacting an estimated 210,000 people in the area. The United Nations has received reports of air strikes and ground-based strikes resulting in scores of civilian casualties, the destruction of civilian infrastructure and displacement. This comes amidst reports of negotiations for a localized agreement between the parties to the conflict.

In Idlib governorate, the situation remains catastrophic, with almost 400,000 people displaced since mid-December, in addition to the tens of thousands who were displaced from eastern Ghouta and eastern Qalamoun. There are simply no more sites or shelters available for the vast majority of new arrivals. There has been a 25 per cent increase in Idlib's displaced population as compared to one year ago, with 1.2 million of the 2 million people in the governorate now displaced, many of them multiple times. This extreme situation places incredible pressure on the host communities. In addition, in recent weeks air strikes have hit hospitals and markets and have come very close to IDP shelters, reportedly killing scores of civilians, including many women and children. Fighting between Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and other non-State armed opposition groups have added further insecurity. Relief organizations are providing assistance, including health care, clean water and sanitation, and education. In order to sustain the assistance, funding is needed.

In Aleppo governorate, between mid-January and mid-March an estimated 137,000 people were displaced by hostilities in Afrin district. The majority of people fled to Tell Rifaat and surrounding areas. Freedom of movement remains an issue for those who have been displaced. Many internally displaced persons reportedly continue to be prevented from moving on to Aleppo city, and people with medical referrals currently have to wait up to 15 days for clearance to travel to Aleppo city for medical care. While there have been some reports of returns taking place to Afrin, the movement back to Afrin also remains extremely limited as people are allegedly being prevented from returning. The United Nations and its partners have scaled up the response to the displaced with regular deliveries to the area. Between 2 and 4 April, through cross-border operations from Turkey, United Nations agencies sent food assistance for over 20,000 people, as well as health-care and other items of critical need. Sustained access to those in Afrin is needed.

On 1 April, the United Nations undertook an assessment mission to Raqqa. Since ISIL was forced out of Raqqa in October, nearly 100,000 people have returned to Raqqa city. However, conditions are not conducive to returns due to the high levels of unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive device contamination, widespread and severe infrastructural damage, and a lack of basic services. Every week, there have been more than 50 casualties reported due to remnants of war. An estimated 70 to 80 per cent of buildings inside Raqqa city are destroyed or damaged.

While public services are slowly resuming, with bakeries opening and limited access to health services, the city lacks electricity and mobile communications, and water is pumped in only a very limited capacity to the outskirts of the city. Up to 95 per cent of households that have returned to Raqqa are food-insecure. Some schools have reopened, although they lack school materials and other supplies. Following the 1 April assessment, United Nations agencies are planning deliveries to complement the ongoing activities of humanitarian organizations already active inside Raqqa. It will also complement the response for those displaced and in need across north-eastern Syria, where 900,000 people receive assistance each month.

I would now like to turn to Rukban, where 50,000 people along the Syria-Jordan border remain in critical need of assistance, having last been provided aid from Jordan in January. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent received permission from the Syrian authorities on 8 March to organize a humanitarian convoy from Damascus, and on 19 March the United Nations received permission to join that mission. Initially, the humanitarian operation was conceived as a drop-off operation, with aid distributed by local leaders. More recently, discussions have included entering the camp to deliver assistance directly to the people. The United Nations continues to work closely with the United States and the Russian Federation to make that possible and ensure that those in need can safely receive the aid they desperately need. At the same time, basic health-care services and water continue to be provided cross-border from Jordan.

After seven years of a conflict that continues to see escalation after escalation, the needs of Syrians have never been higher. The Brussels Conference showed the clear resolve of the international community to place Syria at the top of its agenda and to ensure that immediate life-saving assistance is available to all in need. However, those commitments must now turn into to concrete action. Resolution 2401 (2018) urgently needs to be implemented. The resolution underlines a number of areas for implementation, but let me highlight three in particular where I believe progress is possible now:

First, we need to see firm steps taken to ensure that all parties respect the rules of war. Civilians must be provided protection, with constant care taken to spare them and the infrastructure they rely on. Attacks on hospitals in particular must end. The wounded and the sick must be afforded the treatment and care they need.

Secondly, safe, sustained and unimpeded access to all in need must be ensured so that aid can reach those in need. That means facilitation letters must be issued, allowing cross-line convoys to deploy every week, while at the same time we must see access to areas that recently experienced a change of control open up for regular deliveries.

Thirdly, when convoys deploy, medical items must stop being removed. There is no reason why items previously agreed with the authorities for delivery are removed at the last minute. These are critical life-saving items and they must be allowed on our trucks.

To quote the Secretary General in his opening remarks in a video message to the second Brussels Conference on Syria two days ago:

> "At the recent Security Council retreat just a few days ago in Sweden, I sensed a strong commitment to humanitarian access — and to overcoming the obstacles to the delivery of aid to all Syrians."

We owe it to the people of Syria to build on the momentum and to see concrete improvements on the ground.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Mueller for her briefing.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.